

★ **Three****Valérie Perrin****Hildegard Serle**

Europa Editions (Jun 7, 2022)

Hardcover \$28.00 (512pp)

978-1-60945-755-6

The wounds of a friend group break open following a chance discovery in Valerie Perrin's gripping novel *Three*.

When they were children, it seemed that Adrien, Nina, and Etienne would always be inseparable. Those outside of their trio envied them. They leaned on each other through family tribulations, the cruel whims of adults, and the trials of adolescence. They folded into each other's family vacations, plotted a move in Paris, and helped each other through everyday pains that others could not understand. But adulthood encroached: Etienne, dashing and reckless, branched off to become a detective. Nina, grieving the loss of her grandfather, married a rich older man. And Adrien headed for Paris alone, hoping to make it as a writer.

Apart, the secrets that the friends kept from each other festered, undermining their former ease: Nina's catch was no catch at all. Etienne trembled over a hazy memory trailing from a lakeside tryst. And Adrien, worried that he could voice his truths to no one, still hoped and feared that his friends had caught glimpses of them. But just when the years apart made it seem they would never be three again: a car was pulled from their hometown lake, forcing their reunion.

Perrin's prose is engrossing, transforming ordinary situations into delectable treats. Nina has a childhood habit of opening others' mail in search of love letters; later, her committed work as an animal rescuer is involving. Sun-soaked lyrics complement the book's long stretches. But there also could be a murder among these idyllic turns; there are certainly instances of violence and betrayal. The eventual unveiling of the drowned driver is far from the book's greatest revelation—and farther still from its most poignant.

Startling and affecting, *Three* is a novel about the refuge found in true friends, and about the mercy of self-acceptance.

MICHELLE ANNE SCHINGLER (May / June 2022)

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